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ETHNOGRAPHICAL RESEARCHES IN THE KASAI DISTRICT

ANON (Emil TORDAY)

The Geographical Journal – The Monthly Record, 1909, Vol. 34, No. 2, Aug., pp. 208-221.

Writing from Alela, a few hours' journey west of the Kamcha river, on April 10, Mr. E. Torday sends us some particulars of the ethnographical expedition in which he has been engaged, in company with Mr. W. Hilton-Simpson, since the autumn of 1907. Entering the region by the mouth of the Congo river, the expedition began its serious work at Batempa, a village on the Sankuru tributary of the Kasai, a short distance above Lusambo.

The Batetela tribes between the Sankuru and the Lubefu, a right-bank tributary of the Sankuru, were visited with satisfactory results, and early in March of last year the expedition descended the Sankuru and traversed the country between that river and the Lubudi, a left-bank tributary, obtaining interesting ethnographical collections among the Bangongo, a sub-tribe of the Bakuba.

As a result of his investigations among the Batetela of the Lubefu country, Mr. Torday determined to visit the other Batetela tribes inhabiting the forest country north of the Lukenie, and accordingly in May of last year he and Mr. Hilton-Simpson interrupted their work among the Bakuba, and journeyed via Bena-Dibele into the country north of the Sankuru, where four months were spent wandering in the forest between that river and the Lomela river, the real name of which Mr. Torday says is Dombempila.

The climatic conditions were most unhealthy, and though Mr. Torday suffered no serious ill effects at the time, Mr. Hilton-Simpson nearly succumbed to a bad attack of fever. After returning to the Sankuru the explorers visited the Mushenge (capital) of the paramount chief of the Bakuba, which was made the headquarters of the expedition until the end of last year.

Here Mr. Torday's health broke down under the strain of continued privations, but his exertions were rewarded by the best ethnographical collection he had so far obtained. Every assistance was given to the expedition by the head chief, whom Mr. Torday describes as a most friendly and intelligent native gentleman.

The explorers' stay among the Bakubas showed that the ancient culture of that people had been greatly influenced from the west, and with the object of gaining information on the subject the explorers decided to descend the Sankuru and the Kasai, and then to ascend the Kwilu river to Kikwit, and attempt to reach the Kasai in the direction of Luebo by an overland journey.

This overland journey was in progress at the date of Mr. Torday's letter, but he was very doubtful whether they would be able to reach the Kasai owing to the reputation for hostility to Europeans of the tribes inhabiting the country between the Loange and the Kasai, which still figures on the maps as unexplored.

Throughout the expedition Mr. Torday and Mr. Hilton-Simpson have refrained from employing any armed followers, the establishment of friendly relations with the natives being essential to the pursuit of their investigations.

Besides their ethnographical collections, which have been obtained for the British Museum, they have taken a large number of photographs, including several illustrating the geographical characteristics of the country. The expedition is expected back in England at the end of this year.